

Against the Grain

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Squirreling Away: Managing Information Resources & Libraries – Life is as it is: Flexibility and Change Management

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Squirreling Away: Managing Information Resources & Libraries — Life is as it is: Flexibility and Change Management

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One of the most difficult aspects of any change that we strive to navigate through is the loss of control. As we move into any new endeavor, career, place, living arrangement or professional situation, we realize that one of the most difficult aspects is the need to relearn those elements that we were fairly confident we had under control. This is the one area where many things break down and we revert to the way that we did things in the past, even if it is not working.

There are many instances where it would be wonderful if we controlled how everything played out in our lives. If you could write a script or story of your life, it might be a complete joy. But every time we introduce other elements into our lives, our ownership and control is lessened. When we live with someone else or get married, you simply have to change the way that you function. When you have kids or are dealing with parents, you have to change your priorities and what you might want to do. When you bring a pet into your house, the very same dynamic plays out.

Recently, we kinda celebrated the nine-month-old birthday of my puppy, **Runyon**. He is a catahoula leopard mix that we adopted from **Bottle Babies Rescue** of Allen Park, Michigan in May. We previously had adopted an adult dog, and he came practically trained and house broken. Puppies are different. While **Runyon** looked older than he was, we found out too late, after we had fallen in love with the pooch at the adoption event. At that event, we were told and told again about the need for training, the cost associated with having a dog, and the need for patience with a young dog. But he seemed so calm and composed at the event, we did not think it would be a problem.

In fact the person who was fostering him told us three things that made us feel great about the soon-to-be newest member of our household. First, he was housetrained. Second, he got along very well with cats. And third, he knew algebra. Turns out, all three things were not exactly true. He was not house-trained. All he wants to do is play with the cat (much to **Cosmo's** annoyance). And we have seen no evidence that he knows algebra — or even basic math for that matter. I might have misunderstood that element during the chaos of the day. The disconnect from where we thought we were going and where we needed to go is one of the hardest aspects of pet adoption. It is also one of the hardest aspects of going through any type of change in your life, your

job or your library.

Once again, you might ask yourself where I am going with this? Well, I am going to make a profound a potentially controversial statement. Simply put, life is different with a dog. Very different. When you go to an adoption event, there are pictures in your mind of what your life with a pet will look like. The reality may often a bit different. So as you raise your puppy or kitten (or other type of furry family member), you will likely have some trials and tribulations. However, if you have the right mindset, you can accentuate the positive while eliminating the negative. With the right mindset, you can enjoy the good parts and manage the things that are a surprise. After all, that is what Nature's Miracle is for. Adopting a dog or a puppy is work for certain. However, it is more good than bad. Does it change your life? Absolutely. So what is the best way to manage this? By embracing the flexibility that is need-



It's **Runyon Jones** (our new puppy) — May 4th, 2019 (adoption day) with a toy squirrel.

ed when you bring a puppy into your home.

Flexibility Rules

So with that it is time for my third column on change management in libraries. I have long thought about this as an important topic that seems to be under-appreciated and under-explored in the professional library literature. Having recently navigated my own operation from a traditional library a few years ago to one that is virtually virtual, the time is definitely now to think about this important topic with the vantage point of what we did well, what we did poorly, and what we might do differently.

As a structure for these articles (and hopefully something a bit more down the road), I have broken down change management into six key terms: inevitability, rapidity, flexibility, hospitality, accountability, and empathy. These terms are particularly important to use

in the context of your institutional culture and identity. Through these six terms, I hope to explore how to best manage your operation in less than optimal conditions (and let's face it, most libraries are operating in exactly that "place.") For this column, I am going to write about the need for flexibility by all parties and what it all means at individual libraries. By flexibility, we can describe this as the opposite of rigidity — that inability to bend or change for any reason.

This balance between flexibility and rigidity, can be one of the biggest obstacles to overcome when managing any unit through change (be it large or small). Luckily, we learned something nearly twenty years ago that enables us to roll with the punches quite well. And it is a means that I aspire to use day in and day out as I face the changes that come my way. **Mrs. Pirkola**, my older son's 2nd Grade teacher, preached flexibility every time we met. To this day, we reference her and her rules when trying to sort through life as it comes towards us. She wanted our son to be more flexible in dealing with things that happened in the classroom. In turn, she taught our whole family how to handle the curves that life throws our way.

Flexibility can play itself out in a number of different ways to support a group or unit's change. It becomes a critical tool in the manager's kit to ensure that no matter what happens to the library, that it can still serve and function to support its community. This may run counter to the way that libraries operate. We have established and universal rules, especially with cataloging, that can be restrictive for sure.

What does Flexibility Look Like in Libraries?

While I am going to expand this for subsequent works, there are three areas that I think we can focus on for this introduction to flexibility in libraries. There has been a few articles that have shown up in library literature on this subject, but relatively few considering the amount of change that our profession has gone through over the past twenty years. **Sarah Sutton** (2013) wrote in a summary of articles on serials literature from 2010-2011 that articles show "creating workflows flexible enough to change as those needs and desires change."¹ **Martin Kesselman** in an editorial from 2018 focuses on the fact that our path forward might not be as clear with changes in technology, libraries and the communities

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we serve.² The most successful libraries in navigating through change are likely the ones that have the greatest ability to be flexible given the changes that our profession is being asked to take on. Here are three areas where flexibility has been key in the way we have faced change.

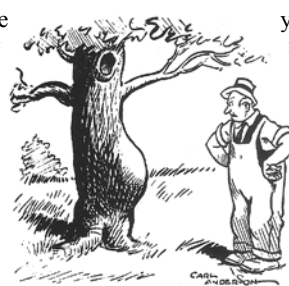
First, flexibility in the services we provide is one of the most important aspects to consider with library change management. There are certain aspects of our work and the services we provide where we need to make sure that we are aligned with our community needs. It seems that much of the literature about marketing in libraries (and elsewhere) is about how to successfully increase adoption or use of a service or product that you are providing vs. providing what is desired. One instance that we have had to change is our desire of managing course reserves in our new library. Taking into consideration the lack of space and the desire not to hire evening staff to work onsite, we opted to change course and not bring back course reserves to our library portfolio. We aspired to move items into electronic format if possible — but as you know, this can be difficult with course adoption texts, let alone textbooks. We had to balance between what we felt we could do with what the needs are in our community and moved accordingly. It would be nice if we could provide this, but it did not meet our abilities and resources.

Second, flexibility with collections is certainly a key aspect to change management. Over the past eight years in our library, we have had flat or declining collections budgets. Even in a flat year, that means cuts to cover inflation for the resources that you are planning to keep. The flexibility involved here is to ensure that your cuts are balanced and that redundancies are eliminated first. While you can work on a straight cost per use model, this will likely not tell the entire story. Resources targeted for faculty and researchers will likely be far less commonly used than ones geared to student use. Additionally, there might be resources that had been staples in the library collection since before you arrived — and represent the core holdings of many libraries. But if they are not being used, then that is an opportunity for you to make changes that reflect your reality at the library.

Third, flexibility with people might be the most important aspect of navigating through change in any organization. I believe that change is an extremely personal construct that will impact different people in vastly unique ways. In our staff of just under twenty, we had some people who saw relatively little change in their day to day life with our transformation — as well as some who had to learn nearly a completely new job. But long before this change, I preached flexibility in the workplace for one simple reason. My premise is that if I am flexible with my team, they in turn may be flexible with our users and the community we

serve. Conversely, if I were rigid or rule bound with my team, it would be difficult to expect them to be flexible with our community. Additionally, a great number of the ways that we may be flexible with our teams can create a better working environment. Giving your team the freedom and flexibility to navigate through these changes as they see fit enables the library group to better serve your community. While there will be aspects of library change that are fairly rigid, especially with space and budget constraints, creating a flexible environment will pay dividends for you and your team.

So just like that cute puppy, kitten, dog, cat or other pet you bring home from an adoption event, there is a great deal of joy that will come



your way. But the more rigid you are in bringing this new being into your family, the more likely you will be disappointed and troubled with the results. Pets can be a great deal of work, but all of it is worth it when they are curled up with you when you are working on your late articles — right? 🐾

Corey Seeman is the Director, Kresge Library Services at the **Ross School of Business** at the **University of Michigan, Ann Arbor**. He is also the new editor for this column that intends to provide an eclectic exploration of business and management topics relative to the intersection of publishing, librarianship and the information industry. No business degree required! He may be reached at <cseeman@umich.edu> or via twitter at @cseeman.

Endnotes

1. **Sutton, Sarah**. "Flexibility in the Face of Change." *Library Resources & Technical Services*, vol. 57, no. 2, Apr. 2013, pp. 77–86. EBSCOhost, doi:10.5860/lrts.57n1.77.
2. **Kesselman, Martin A**. "Hot Tech Trends in Libraries: Flexibility and Changeability Is the New Sustainability." *Library Hi Tech News*, vol. 35, no. 8, Sept. 2018, pp. 1–5. EBSCOhost, doi:10.1108/LHTN-09-2018-0062.

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of **UMBC** authors. The system automatically creates author pages, but creates an additional author page for every different form of a name. A decision to put authority control in place for **UMBC** author names would collate their works all on one author page.

Repository training for faculty was developed and scheduled, but with very little interest in self-submission on campus, no one RSVP'd and the training session was cancelled. The **University of Maryland**, College Park, has had some success with a workshop on authors' rights, and important rights issues directly pertinent to the repository can be addressed in that type of workshop, so in the future, the DSS Librarian hopes to develop and offer such a workshop.

Moving from a part-time student assistant with diminishing returns on training to a full-time staff person is also highly desirable. That would facilitate much more work getting done at a higher quality. This would also allow the DSS Librarian to shift from spending most of her time doing staff-level production work (or correcting the student assistant's work), to doing further outreach and promotion of the repository and the works in it, refining procedures and documentation, and batch

clean-up of the data in the system. At present, the Digital Scholarship Service Librarian can only take on a single project each summer. More time would also allow her to develop and offer workshops and do more outreach. Additionally, she could develop other digital scholarship services in consultation with library management and write grant proposals toward obtaining funding for startup costs.

Conclusions

The gradual implementation was good preparation for extending the repository service to all of campus, and moving to a production mode where many more items would be processed and added each month. Basic procedures were in place, allowing a shift in focus from legal and technical issues to people, from how to do work to working with staff to increase production. It also gave the novice DSS Librarian time to learn. In 18 months since the implementation of *ScholarWorks@UMBC*, 1,683 items have been added, bringing the total number of works to 2,773, and there have been 4,145 visits to *ScholarWorks@UMBC*. This is a strong start, but in time **UMBC** could potentially be adding 4,000+ items per year to the repository. 🐾